nature net

A newsletter of Nature Kenya-The EANHS

March 2023

A section of the restored area at Chehe forest in Mount Kenya. Photo M. Kiama

Collaboration for Mount Kenya forest restoration

By Martin Kiama

Found on the country's highest mountain - Mount Kenya - is Mount Kenya forest. It's a crucial catchment area, providing water and other essential ecosystem goods and services to adjacent communities and the country. Mount Kenya forest is a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), Important Bird Area (IBA) and World Heritage Site. It is home to many threatened animal species like the Abbott's Starling, Kenya Jewel damselfly, Mount Kenya Bush Viper, among others.

Unfortunately, the future of the rich biodiversity of Mount Kenya forest is on shaky ground, due to threats like forest fires, land conversion, pollution, tree felling, game hunting, invasive species and climate change. These threats have seen the forest rapidly lose part of its cover and biodiversity.

Fortunately, efforts by 27 Community Forest Associations (CFAs), together with Nature Kenya and the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) have resulted in the restoration of more than 500 hectares of degraded forest areas, with over 500,000 indigenous trees planted in the past five years. Based on the progress of the planted trees, community groups in Mount Kenya can attest to the success of the restoration initiative.

For instance, the Chehe CFA, with 768 members, majority women, manages the Chehe forest block on the border between Kirinyaga and Nyeri counties. Community members engaged in planting and maintaining the restored sites have also earned wages that have helped them improve their livelihoods.

"Proceeds from the sale of tree seedlings helped us to expand our tree nursery. We are now propagating bamboo, which we anticipate will earn us more than Ksh. 2 million during the planting season," says Geoffrey Muriithi Wandeto, Chehe CFA chairman.

Wandeto further says that the restoration of Mount Kenya forest comes at the opportune moment when the Critically Endangered Mountain Bongos are being re-introduced into their natural habitat.

"Restoration efforts supported by Nature Kenya have drawn the interest of a project seeking to conserve Mountain Bongos. This project is now working with the Chehe and Ragati CFAs, bringing in more goodies to us. Two of our members are working with this project to raise Mountain Bongo conservation awareness in schools," adds Wandeto.

The trees in the restored sites have grown to a height of between 150 - 200 cm. Nickson Macharia Mariga, Chehe Forest station manager, puts the young trees' survival rate above 75 per cent. Mariga attributes the impressive survival rate to Nature Kenya's support.

"Nature Kenya has continuously supported the weeding and replacement of dead seedlings. The collaboration between the community and KFS has also been key to ensuring the survival of the saplings," says Mariga.

Maintaining a high survival rate has not been easy, Wandeto reveals. Low rainfall and prolonged drought have presented many challenges. However, the Chehe CFA chairman is upbeat.

"We, the community of Chehe, will continue forest restoration activities in Mount Kenya. Protecting the biodiversity in this area is our responsibility. We urge more stakeholders to recognize and support our restoration efforts," says Wandeto.

*On Friday, 31 March all roads lead to the Karen Country Club for this year's '**Lungs for Kenya**' charity golf tournament. This tournament seeks to raise funds to support the restoration of degraded forests in Mount Kenya and the Aberdares. You can be part of this worthwhile initiative by registering as a player for the tournament, sponsoring the event, donating raffle or auction items or pledging any amount to support restoration. See insert for more details.*

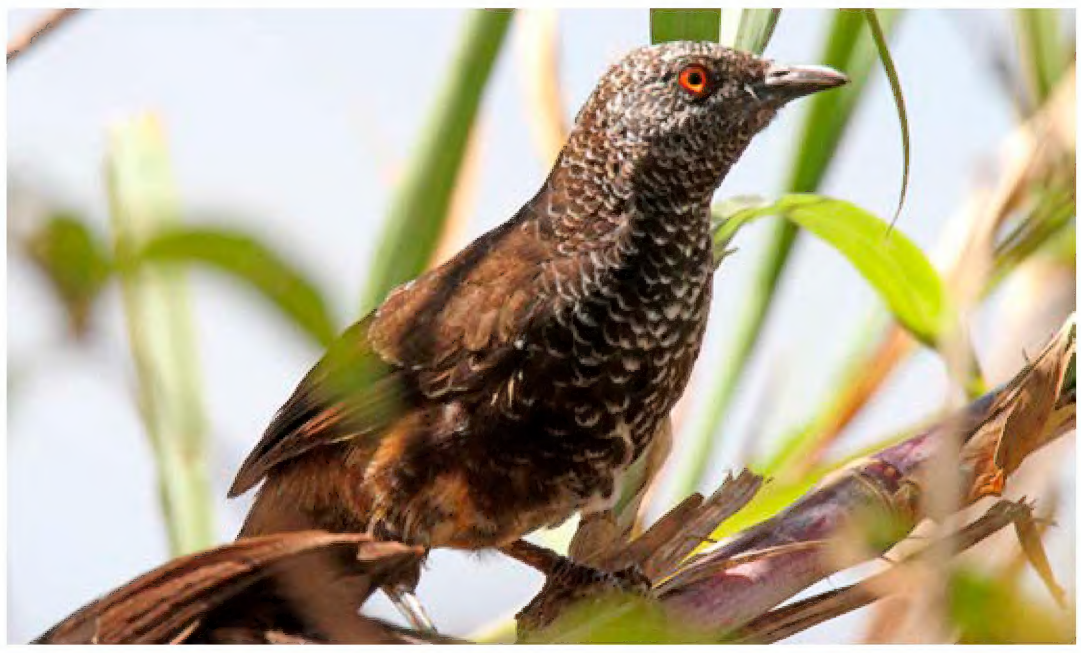
ANNOUNCEMENT

NatureKenya
THE EAST AFRICA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

The
113th Annual General Meeting
of the East Africa Natural History Society
will be held on
Wednesday 3 May 2023 from **noon - 2:00pm**
at the
Louis Leakey Hall, Nairobi National Museum and via Zoom

KBA in Focus: Mukurwe-ini Valleys

By Joshua Sese



Hinde's Babbler. Photo by P. Usher

Extending to the lower southeast slopes of the Aberdare Mountains and the far southwest of Mount Kenya forest in Nyeri, is the Mukurwe-ini valleys Important Bird Area (IBA) and Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). Mukurwe-ini valleys are home to the Hinde's Babbler (*Turdoides hindei*), a globally threatened and range-restricted bird species found only in Kenya.

Covering an estimated area of 110,000 Ha, the valleys predominantly occur in privately owned lands, mainly comprising small-scale coffee and subsistence crop farms. Apart from the Hinde's Babbler, Mukurwe-ini valleys also host more than 315 plant and 265 bird species, among other taxonomic groups. The valleys comprise vegetated stream and river courses and dense thickets dominated by the invasive *Lantana camara* plant. The thickets provide a suitable habitat for the Hinde's Babbler.

Owing to the unprotected status of the Mukurwe-ini valleys KBA, the Hinde's Babbler population there is severely fragmented and continuously declining due to changes in land uses.

Threats facing the KBA and its biodiversity include habitat loss, human disturbance, agrochemical pollution, lack of awareness among community members, poverty leading to pressure on existing resources and climate change. Human population increase in the area has augmented land use, resulting in the clearing of the Hinde's Babbler's habitats for agriculture. Currently, there is no government strategy in place to enhance the conservation of this ecologically valuable KBA.

The Mukurwe-ini valleys are of great aesthetic, cultural and religious importance to the local communities. These valleys host famous Mau Mau caves, beautiful waterfalls, traditional Kikuyu homesteads and indigenous bushes treasured for their herbal medicines. The valleys' ecotourism potential is immeasurable. Their scientific value is equally great, affirming the need to protect and cherish the KBA. Wajee Nature Park is currently the only protected site, and Hinde's Babbler is the star attraction.

Mukurwe-ini Environment Volunteers (MEVO) is the KBA's site support group (SSG). MEVO has been engaged in conservation activities at the KBA since its inception in 2004. The activities include site monitoring, advocacy and awareness creation. The SSG, with assistance from Nature Kenya and National Museums of Kenya (NMK), has been conducting a bi-annual survey of the Hinde's Babbler since 2004. MEVO also organizes volleyball tournaments during the annual environmental days to raise awareness for the conservation of Hinde's Babbler. These tournaments draw teams from local schools, colleges and local communities.

World Wetlands Day 2023

World Wetlands Day was marked on 2 February at various sites across Kenya. The national celebrations took place at the Enkongu Enkare in Narok County. Thirteen community groups affiliated to Nature Kenya held activities to commemorate the day. These were: Tana Delta Conservation Network (Tana River Delta), Dakatcha Woodland Conservation Group (Dakatcha Woodland), Yala Ecosystem Site Support Group (Yala Swamp), Lake Naivasha Biodiversity Conservation Group (Lake Naivasha), Lake Elmenteita Community-based Organization (Lake Elmenteita), Busia Environmental Conservation Education Program (Busia grasslands), Nyahururu Bird Club (Lake Ol' Bolossat), Ithugu Self-Help Group (Mt. Kenya forest), Kijabe Environment Volunteers Organization (Kereita Forest), Sabaki River Conservation and Development Organization (Sabaki River Mouth), Friends of Nature Bogoria (Lake Bogoria), Friends of Dunga Swamp and Lake Kenyatta Water Users Association (Lamu County). Over 3,300 people, including school children, participated in the events.

Community volunteers conduct monitoring at the Bore wetland, Dakatcha to mark the World Wetlands Day. Photo by E. Utumbi

Clean-up at the shores of Lake Elmenteita during the World Wetlands Day. Photo by G. Odera

For updates visit
www.naturekenya.org

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Lungs For Kenya

13th Charity Golf Tournament

KAREN COUNTRY CLUB | MARCH 31ST 2023

Tee up to help us restore Kenya's forests

Register for our **Lungs for Kenya** charity golf tournament at the Karen Country Club on March 31. Proceeds from this charity tournament will be channeled towards the restoration of degraded forest areas in Mt. Kenya.

Be part of this worthy initiative:

- **Sponsor the tournament (hole sponsorship Ksh. 100,000)**
- **Register to play as an individual (Ksh. 3,000) or team of four (Ksh. 12,000)**
- **Donate a raffle or auction item**
- **Donate any amount to support restoration**

Register to Play

Golfer 1 _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Golfer 2 _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Golfer 3 _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Golfer 4 _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Registration payment or donations can be made via Lipa na MPesa, Pay Bill>business number **100300**>account **Golf 2023** or by cheque payable to Nature Kenya.
You can register online here: **https://forms.gle/zGPJWKXQqBnbYieQ8**

For inquiries please call 0739200216 Or email Angela <nkmembership@naturekenya.org>

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Lungs For Kenya

13th Charity Golf Tournament

KAREN COUNTRY CLUB | MARCH 31ST 2023

Time

Tee-off starts at 8:00 am

Sponsorship Packages

Platinum Sponsor:
Ksh. 1,000,000
(Includes 6 teams)

Gold Sponsor:
Ksh. 750,000
(Includes 5 teams)

Silver Sponsor:
Ksh. 500,000
(Includes 4 teams)

Bronze Sponsor:
Ksh. 250,000
(Includes 3 teams)

Hole Sponsorship:
Ksh. 100,000
(Includes 2 teams)

Presentations

Cocktail and award event at the Club House @ 6:00 pm

Tournament Sponsorship Form

Name of Individual/Company _____

Sponsorship Package (Please tick appropriate)

☐ Platinum Sponsor (Ksh. 1,000,000) ☐ Gold Sponsor (Ksh. 750,000)

☐ Silver Sponsor (Ksh. 500,000) ☐ Bronze Sponsor (Ksh. 250,000)

☐ Hole Sponsorship (Ksh. 100,000)

Sponsorship/Donation Amount (in Kshs.) _____

_____

Contact Name _____

Contact Telephone Number _____

Contact Email Address _____

Signature _____

Teams (List players below)

Team 1	Team 2	Team 3 (Bronze, Silver, Gold & Platinum)	Team 4 (Silver, Gold & Platinum only)	Team 5 (Gold & Platinum only)	Team 6 (Platinum only)

Kindly fill and return form to Nature Kenya - the East Africa Natural History Society, National Museums of Kenya, Museum Hill, Kipande Road, P.O. Box 44486, 00100 GPO, Nairobi or email to nkmembership@naturekenya.org.
Make cheque payable to: Nature Kenya

Some Waterbirds of Kenya

Blacksmith Plovers at Thika Sewage Treatment Works. Photo by Anthony Mokaya

Grey Crowned Cranes at Northlands. Photo by Chintan Gohel

Spur-winged Geese at Northlands. Photo by Chintan Gohel

Planets at sunset and sunrise

By Fleur Ng'weno

March opens with planets passing each other at dusk and dawn. In the evening, look for brilliant Venus and bright Jupiter in the west. Venus, orbiting between the Earth and the sun, is rising higher; Jupiter, orbiting beyond Earth, is moving towards the horizon, disappearing into the sunset glare at month's end. Reddish Mars is high overhead at sunset, setting after midnight.

Before dawn on March 2, two other planets are passing each other: Small but bright Mercury and fainter Saturn. Mercury sinks into the sunrise, reappearing near Jupiter at sunset at month's end. Saturn rises in the dawn sky, near the waning crescent moon on March 19th and 20th.

The new, slim crescent moon seems to be near Jupiter on March 22 and near Venus on the 24th. Waxing larger, the crescent moon appears near Mars on the 28th. (Did you see the crescent moon between Venus and Jupiter on 22 February? Apologies, I had written 'January'.)

Moon, March '23

March 21 – new moon. The sighting of this slender crescent moon it will usher in Ramadan, the Islamic month of prayer and daytime fasting, most likely on March 22.

March 7 – full moon, rising in the east. March 15 – last quarter; half-lit moon overhead at dawn. March 29 – first quarter; half-lit moon overhead at sunset.

March Stars

The names given here for the planets and stars are from ancient Greek, Arab and Roman astronomers, and used in English today. The seafaring Greeks gave names to the patterns that the stars form in the sky, called constellations. Other cultures all over the world have other names and stories for the planets, the stars and the patterns they make.

Face south on an evening with few or no clouds; Sirius, the brightest star of the night sky, is high in the sky towards the south. High overhead, the constellation of Orion, the Hunter, is striding across the sky, as the ancient Greeks saw him (See February Nature Net).

The Hunter is followed by his hunting dogs: Sirius the Dog Star, and to the left (northeast) Procyon the little dog. You can imagine Sirius as the dog's bright eye, and the stars just below as forming his body, feet and tail.

Turn around to look north. Orion is now upside down! Below and left (west) of Orion, the Pleiades and Hyades star clusters are dipping towards the west. To the north, bright stars form a pentagon shape, part of the constellation Auriga, with its bright star Capella. High in the north, between Auriga and Procyon, is the constellation Gemini – two sets of two stars. The waxing moon is near the bright star Pollux in Gemini on March 2.

Now turn to look east, with your back to the sunset. The constellation Leo the Lion is high in the east. Imagine the bright star Regulus as the lion's heart; and the line of stars next to it, shaped like a half circle, as the lion's head and mane. The waxing gibbous moon is near Regulus on March 5.

On a clear night away from city lights, you may see the Milky Way stretching like a pale ribbon across the sky, past Sirius, Orion, Gemini and Auriga. It is our galaxy, made up of millions of stars, including our sun.

Morning Sky

After Orion has set in the west, the Scorpion rises in the southeast, and crawls across the southern sky. Alpha Centauri, third brightest star at night, is in the southwest.

March sun

March 20 is the equinox – when day and night are of equal length, all over the world. For us near the equator, it means the sun will be in the north during the day, until the September equinox.

Birding Updates

Wednesday Morning Birdwalks in Nairobi

Please observe Covid-19 protocols as needed: wear or bring masks and meet at designated venues.

1st March – Museum Grounds / Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8:00 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

8th March – Ondiri Swamp. Meet at 8:30 am at the Ondiri Wetland Information Centre. Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Waiyaki Way towards Kikuyu. Turn left at Gitaru onto Southern Bypass. Slip left onto Kikuyu overpass. Take first left turn at overpass and drive straight to the Information Centre. Ondiri Swamp is the only quaking bog in Kenya, a presumed source of the Nairobi River.

15th March – City Park. Meet at 8:30 am at the parking near the Coca-Cola Kiosk. Directions: Coming from the City centre, take Limuru Road past Aga Khan Hospital. Make a U-turn at Total Energies Petrol Station, Limuru Road. Drive back along Limuru Road and turn left onto City Park Road next to City Park Market.

22nd March – Oloolua Nature Trail, Institute of Primate Research, Karen. Meet at 8:30 am in the Nature Trail's main entrance. Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Ngong Road towards Karen. Turn left at Shell Petrol Station onto Karen Road. The Nature Trail is about 500 m after Karen Blixen Museum. There is an entrance fee of **Ksh. 100** per adult and **Ksh. 50** per child for Nature Kenya members (bring your membership card – soft or hard copy).

29th March – Paradise Lost. Meet at Paradise Lost Main Gate at 8:30 am. Directions: Take Kiambu Road. Turn Left at Paradise Lost junction in Thindigua after Runda Greens before Quick Mart Supermarket. Turn right at Kencom Apartments just after Kasarini Primary School. It's about 500 m to the main gate. Thanks to the management for welcoming the birdwalk.

19th March. Sunday Bird Watch – Lukenya Hill. Meet at 8:30 am at the Lukenya Schools turn off. Directions: Coming from City Centre, take Mombasa Road towards Machakos Junction. Turn left at the Lukenya Schools sign post before Maanzoni Lodge. Proof of membership is required (bring your membership card – soft or hard copy). Bring snacks and drinking water. Thanks to Mountain Club of Kenya for welcoming the bird watch.

If you have questions, please write < news@naturekenya.org> or phone 0780-149200.

Bird Ringing at Nairobi National Museum grounds usually take place on Tuesday mornings. Please confirm with Titus Imboma <Imbomati911@gmail.com> Phone 0721-649452.

Thursday Birdwalks in Malindi

2nd March - Malindi Museum Grounds. Meet at 4:00 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

9th March - Mayungu. Meet at 4:00 pm at the Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

16th March - Mtangani via Afya Hospital. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

23rd March - Malindi Harbor. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

30th March - Moi Village. Meet at 4:00 pm at Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

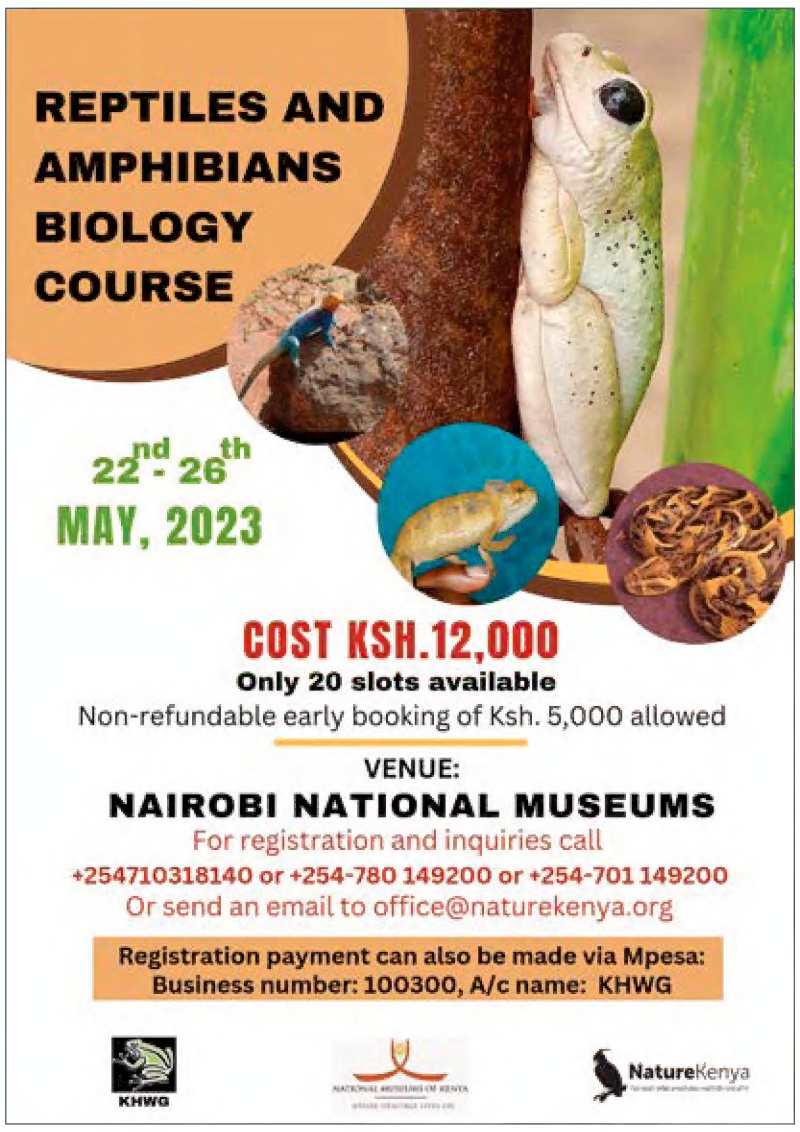
Saturday Bird Watch

25th March - Sabaki River Estuary. Meet 7:00 am at Malindi Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office. The bird walk is likely to end in 3 hours time (Bring drinking water).

For more information, email: <malindimembers@naturekenya.org > or phone 0725223042.

Mombasa Birdwalks are held the 3rd Saturday of each month. To check meeting time and place, check Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FFJmombasa/>
Or contact: Taibali Hamzali <thamzali@gmail.com> / 0733-980540
or Kelvin Mazera <klvnrua@yahoo.com> / 0720-928783

The **Fundamentals of Ornithology certificate course for bird guides and birders** takes place this month from 23rd to 31st at the Elsamare Field Study Centre, Naivasha. For more details kindly email <foo@naturekenya.org> or call 0726778558.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- Enter the amount, enter your PIN
- Confirm details & press OK

For details on associated groups such as Youth Committee, Ethnoconservation Committee, Succulenta, and Friends of Nairobi Arboretum or City Park, contact office@naturekenya.org